

**CITY OF BRIDGEPORT
CHARTER REVISION COMMISSION
REGULAR MEETING
MARCH 22, 2012**

ATTENDANCE: Cathleen Simpson, Chair; George Estrada, Florisca Carter, Ruben Felipe, Charles Valentino (5:45 p.m.) Rev. William Marshall, (5:45 p.m.)

STAFF: Atty. Steven Mednick, Atty. Mark Anastasi, Atty. Ed Maley

CALL TO ORDER

Ms. Simpson called the meeting to order at 5:40 p.m.

MINUTES

March 8, 2012 -

The following corrections were noted:

Pg. 3 paragraph 4, line 1: please change the following from: Mr. Valentino asked about the cost of education for a student. Atty. Mulligan said that he did not have exact figures, but explained that a student without special needs would be assigned a set

TO: Mr. Valentino asked about the cost of education for a student. Atty. Mulligan said that he did not have exact figures, but it was over \$10,000. He explained that a student without special needs would be assigned a set

March 15, 2012 -

Pg. 7, paragraph 5, please change the following from: "Ms. Carter thanked everyone for their comments. She said that she was happy to be part of the process, particularly since there was only one student at Bassick that was on grade level."

TO: "Ms. Carter thanked Ms. Zambrano and particularly for the comments that she supplied about the student at Bassick."

Mr. Valentino and Rev. Marshall joined the meeting at 5:45 p.m.

Pg 8, paragraph 2, line 3 – please change the following from the child into a charter school. " the child into a charter school." To "the child into a magnet school."

**** MR. FELIPE MOVED TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF MARCH 8, 2012 AND MARCH 15, 2012 AS CORRECTED.**

**** MR. ESTRADA SECONDED.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

The Commission then reported about the public hearing at Black Rock Library on Wednesday.

Mr. Valentino said that a number of people had shown up. A number of comments centered on the feeling that there was major dysfunction in the City. There is a lack of trust and a number of staff expressed their dissatisfaction with their bosses and the general lack of communication. Ms. Simpson said that the Library will be discussed next Thursday. Mr. Valentino said that it was through out the city. Mr. Felipe said that he disagreed. The general overall feeling is that those who spoke were in favor of the changes in the Charter. Discussion followed.

Mr. Estrada said that he felt like the people were overwhelmed. He said that his impression was that something has to change, because it is harming the children.

Mr. Estrada said that one thing that bothered him was that there were some people who had political aspirations. The Board of education is a good place to start a political career.

Mr. Estrada said that at the lunch meeting, people were reluctant to give their names. However, this was a great opportunity to talk. One thing that came through was that there were internal problems with the Library

Mr. Estrada said that the accountability aspect was part of the issues at the Library. The last two weeks have been exhausting, but very enlightening.

PRELIMINARY DISCUSSION ON PUBLIC EDUCATION GOVERNANCE

Mr. Valentino said that there were a number of young teachers in Bridgeport that would be leaving and the older teachers will eventually retire. Mr. Estrada said that he has contact with other teachers who teach in other towns, and while it remains a challenging job, they have the support of their schools. Discussion about this followed.

Ms. Carter related an incident that happened when she was substituting and the security guards came into the 7th grade classroom and strip searched the students. However, people were arguing about losing their right to vote for the school board member, which they have had for years. She then wondered who was considering the rights of the students who were strip searched.

A discussion followed about how school board members are selected for candidates on the ballot. Ms. Carter pointed out that it would be important to have qualified candidates on the Board.

UPDATE AND PRESENTATION BY COUNSEL OF MISCELLANEOUS ISSUES AND SCHEDULE.

Atty. Mednick said that he had compiled a list of notes from the interviews and quotations with the names of the speaker's names. He also gave a brief overview of the AEI report and explained that the compilation was broken out into sections such as "Why change the system?"; "Why keep it the same?" and other topics. He said that he used the term "mayoral involvement" rather than "mayoral control". "Parent based representation" is also covered along with eligibility requirements and the broad concepts of democracy. It will be important to clarify what the real civil rights issue is: whether it is the right to vote for the School Board members or the right of the children to receive an education.

Ms. Simpson said that she would like to hear input about the fact finding process and impressions. Rev. Marshall said that it was wonderful to hear all the different aspects. Rev. Marshall noted that Ms. Hilliard had expressed concern about conflicts of interest. He pointed out that the main concern was that the current system was not working. It is a major issue. In his dealing with the public as both a pastor and barber, he is aware of the number of people who do not want to put their children in the Bridgeport school system. One of the last people to speak at the public hearing was a young woman who felt she was robbed of an education and wondered "what if" and how her life would have been different if she had attended a school in a neighboring district.

Rev. Marshall said that he would still like to hear from the former BOE members as to why they would like to keep the system in place. He agreed that "mayoral involvement" would be a better term to use since the "mayoral control" is not accurate.

Rev. Marshall reminded everyone that there had been a speaker who was very angry because the Mayor could not fill all the vacancies on the current Boards and Commissions. Mr. Felipe said that one of the problems was that in the previous administration instituted much stricter regulations for appointment and the results of the stricter guidelines, the process can take five or six months. Atty. Anastasi commented that all the screening was covered in the ordinances and the reason it would be difficult to change is because it would be perceived as the administration being lacks in requirement.

Mr. Valentino said that he felt that the whole City was crying out for change. He said that he had served on a number of boards, including the Zoning Board, and now knows when it is time to leave because of burn out. If a change can help the City, he's for it. The teachers need respect. This Charter Revision Board has been the best Board he has been appointed to and that after Tuesday night's testimony, he feels that a change is needed because it is clear that the children are suffering.

Rev. Marshall informed the other Commission members that the first speaker at the public hearing had verbally attacked him at another meeting of ministers. He said that while he benefited from the civil rights movement, the point is to vote for education.

Mr. Felipe said that after working for a decade for government, it is easy to get caught up in minutia. He is also a parent. His nephews, nieces and the children of friends and acquaintances all attend the Bridgeport Public Schools. He said that while the Civil Right issue was a benefit for him, but the piece that never was completed was for the education of urban children. There also a right of self-determination is also at stake here since the residents have the right to choose the form of government for the city. The civil rights question of this generation is about education. He commented that the process has been great for him.

Following the public hearing, Mr. Felipe said that he noticed that the speakers who did not want to change the system didn't speak about the children. He said that at the end of the process, the members will be making change and some people will not like it, but the Commission members will have clear consciences. Mr. Felipe added that the Commission's job is to create the framework to allow the changes to happen.

Mr. Estrada said that when he was asked to come on the board, his first statement was, "If I do this, these are the requirements I'll be looking for" in order to be a representative for the City. Having diversity and minority representation was critical. Mr. Estrada said that he was told everyone on the Commission was an independent thinkers, and was told that he would be proud to be part of the Commission. Mr. Estrada said that he was proud to be part of this and would be voting his conscience. At his home, there are lively debates on the various issues. Rev. Marshall said that it was really lively at the barbershop. Mr. Estrada said that this was about the children.

Ms. Carter said that she felt this has been a very holistic experience and no one brought their own agendas to the table. She said that she wished that the whole City could have witnessed the meetings. Having moved here from Boston, people thought Ms. Carter was crazy. Ms. Carter pointed out that she was raised in a different country and had been told over and over again that education was the key. She then related some of her experiences in the Bridgeport Public School system. Ms. Carter said that she was somewhat on the fence about mayoral control, because at the end of the day, everyone is going to be responsible for making this work. In his presentation, Professor Viteritti pointed out that mayor involvement was not the complete answer and everyone needs to be involved. Whatever is decided, the children of Bridgeport need to be taken care of.

Ms. Simpson said that she grew up in a well to do household in a neighboring community. During a time when she worked with DCYF, she became deeply concerned. After seeing what goes on in the schools, she couldn't put her children in the public schools. Looking at the situation, she felt that if nothing was done, lives would be hurt. During the public hearing, one of the teachers commented that the students graduate and he sees them in the coffee shops and delis. She wondered if having the students work in delis and coffee shops was what the speaker

felt was the goal of education. A school psychologist commented that the Board was functioning fine. That was very scary for her. Mr. Felipe agreed and added that the speaker felt it might be fine for other people's children but perhaps not for the speaker's own children.

Rev. Marshall said he was impressed with fact that when hearing from people involved in NY and also from Atty. Maley, who has been quiet but made several remarks full of insight.

Mr. Felipe said that the most ridiculous statement was former Council Member Robert Walsh's comment about the towns of New Canaan and Wilton have elected BOE members, and therefore Bridgeport should, also. Atty. Anastasi noted that Mr. Walsh was currently running for a position on the Board of Education.

Mr. Felipe pointed out that the city has enough work to do without running the Board of Education and he added that Ms. Hilliard had contradicted herself in comments.

In the beginning, Mr. Felipe said,. he has been uncertain about the type of model, but Mayor DeStefano had sealed the deal for him, and he was for a fully appointed board from a qualified pool. The elected Board of Education is not the only place that the City needs qualified candidates.

Ms. Simpson said that having a staggered elections system could be distracted because of the election process and that she was in favor of having the administration appoint the entire board. Discussion followed about embedding the qualifications into the Charter. Ms. Carter reminded everyone that having the community having a sense of ownership in this would be critical. She said that it would be important to have everyone at the table.

The discussion then moved to the need for parental involvement, along with the clergy for the students who are unfocused and drifting.

Atty. Mednick said that the School Board has impact. He said that if the City moved to a fully appointed Board, there would be a transition, if there was no change in State Law. Another issue would be if there were vacancies in the elected seats, the replacement would have to fall within the appointed positions.

Mr. Felipe said that he was going to perform Mr. Weichsel's role and ask about the school governance. He said that he would like to see something where every school strongly encouraged parental involvement. Discussion followed.

It is important point to articulate that the parents are not losing their ability to give input. Atty. Mednick said that most charters have been silent on this issue, but the concept of parental involvement is universal.

Ms. Simpson said that in summary, she felt that everyone on the Commission was on board with the idea that change was needed.

The discussion moved to the upcoming meeting on Tuesday.

Ms. Carter said that she felt there needed to be a better integration of departments such as Social Services with the BOE.

Atty. Mednick said that in the draft, he had tried to create different categories, like tax collector, public safety, education/community services/culture. Ms. Carter said that she had concerns about the lack of accountability to the Mayor and to others. Mr. Felipe explained that the City does not provide many direct services to the resident. The Federal government has encouraged partnerships between the City and the private entities. The City often acts as the pass through for the funding. It was decided to contact Ms. Kabel and request that she come to address the Commission.

Rev. Marshall said that while most of the comments were focused on the Education at the Public Hearing, one speaker mentioned the Sikorsky Airport and the representation on the Airport Commission. Atty. Mednick informed the Commissioners that the airport issue was created by Special Act and would have to be carefully considered before any kind of change could be made. Discussion followed about coming to consensus.

ADJOURNMENT

**** MR. VALENTINO MOVED TO ADJOURN.**

**** MR. ESTRADA SECONDED.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

The meeting adjourned at 7:45 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Sharon L. Soltes
Telesco Secretarial Services

